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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses two important aspects involved in orienting an ex-offender to college. The first aspect is the selection of students for admission; the second is the structuring of individual counseling and class orientation to examine important psychological and social changes that the student must make to be successful in college and society. (Author)

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SELECTION AND COUNSELING STRATEGIES

By Philip Bonifacio, Ph.D.

I would like to address two important aspects involved in orienting an ex-offender to college. The first aspect is the selection of students for admission; the second is the structuring of individual counseling and class orientation to examine important psychological and social changes that the student must make to be successful in college and society.

SELECTION

The issue of selection criteria has two implicit assumptions about education, specifically higher education, as a rehabilitation technique. The first is that college cannot help rehabilitate all ex-offenders who seek it - the offender or the college, or both, may not have sufficient resources to overcome obstacles to the individual's rehabilitation. He may not have enough ego strength to cope with the demands of being a college student, and the institution may not have the financial resources to compensate for his ego deficits by creating a "life support system" which would insulate him from those demands. The college can provide limited special assistance to a limited number of ex-offenders.

The second implicit assumption is that ex-offenders are not a homogeneous group with respect to psychological and social characteristics. The college, knowing that it cannot help all ex-offenders, must therefore select those individuals who will benefit most be receiving special assistance from the college. In effect, the college must divide the applicants into three groups in much the same way French medical corpsmen had to categorize wounded in World War I:

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Group 1 contains those individuals who can make the transition from prison to college with minimal difficulty and so require no special assistance; unfortunately this group is quite small.

Group 2 consists of those ex-offenders who do not have enough ego strength to make the transition from prison to college even with maximal assistance by the college; unfortunately this group is quite large.

Group 3 comprises those individuals who can make the transition only with special assistance from the college at critical points of the transition process; it is this group of ex-offenders who should be selected for a special orientation program.

The educational rehabilitation program's success is thus dependent on its ability to differentiate applicants into the three groups in order to maximize the impact of its assistance on those who need it and can benefit from it. Selection of applicants is the first major task of the counseling function. Perhaps it might be helpful to anticipate the effects of accepting all applicants without screening on a small pilot program: first, there is an enormous casework burden placed on the counselor by those who are exploiting the program - he becomes an educational parole officer who must be wary of the student's manipulation and investigate his whereabouts and behavior on and off campus. Second, those who are manipulating the program may become involved in crime again, causing adverse reactions from the public and from the college administration. Finally, all the effort and time wasted keeping track of manipulators is lost to those ex-offenders who need it and could

benefit from it.

Selection Procedure

An effective selection procedure requires cooperation among the college and the correction authorities at all levels. As Feldman (1975) points out, clear understandings are required of whom the program will serve, what defines a low, medium, or high risk applicant, and what are the specific biographical criteria (e.g., age limits, type and number of offenses, education prerequisites). Screening should be cooperative but the college must have the final word on accepting a candidate into the program.

The assessment of the psychological and social strength of the applicant is in essence an examination of his ego strength. Bellak, Hurvich and Gediman (1973) have described 12 ego functions which are most important in assessing ego strength. Six of those functions are particularly important in selection criteria. They are:

1. Judgment - the anticipation of probable consequences of intended behavior; the extent to which actual behavior reflects awareness of its probable consequences.
2. Regulation and control of drives, affects and impluses - the directness of impulse expression; the ability to delay impulse expression; the ability to tolerate frustration, anxiety and depression.
3. Object relations - the degree and kind of relating to others (e.g., narcissism, empathy, reciprocity); the level of maturity or relating to others.
4. Defensive function - the degree to which maladaptive thinking and behavior are affected by defense mechanisms.

5. Synthetic-integrative function - the ability to reconcile the often conflicting demands of id, ego and superego, and to accept these conflicting demands as aspects of one's self.

6. Mastery-competence - one's actual performance in relation to his capacity to perform effectively; one's level of self confidence; i.e., his expectations of success based on actual performance.

Sullivan, Grant, and Grant (1957) formulated a typology of ego development based on the study of delinquents which provides a valuable model with which to categorize the level of ego development in adult offenders. They describe seven levels in the development of interpersonal maturity and the functioning of the adult delinquent personality in the first five levels. The most important levels in assessing ego develoment of ex-offenders are Levels 2 through 4. The adult delinquent whose ego has not progressed past Level 2 (Integration of Nonself Differences) sees people only as aides or obstacles to his own satisfactions. He crudely manipulates others without awareness of their feelings or the consequences of his manipulation on them or himself. When denied satisfaction of his needs, he may express his rage and then withdraw from the denying person and object, or he may simply leave with his hostility smoldering but unexpressed. Impulsive aggression may lead to assault charges while the withdrawal from the denying object may lead to nomadism. During incarceration he is in a state of chronic indignation since the laws he broke and his incarceration are seen as denial of his needs.

The adult criminal at Level 3 (Integration of Rules) still has not developed an internalized sense of guilt and still sees others as means

to his own gratification of needs, but he has developed an awareness of rules which he regards as magical charms of control. He seeks for absolute rules which define exaactly what is expected of him so that he may later invoke the rule over others to get what he wants. He is concerned only with the strength of external forces. Because he still sees others as objects and seeks immediate gratification, the methods of gratification he develops will probably come in conflict with laws. The person at Level 3 may be a "con-man" trying to make others give him what he wants without their being aware, or when caught he may try to avoid punishment by claiming ignorance of the rules. Rather than a con-man, the Level 3 person may be a conformist who feels that if he satisfies the demands of others he may then have his needs satisfied; he plays by the "house rules" in whatever "house" he resides at that moment. Thus the rules are situation-specific, not general. When caught in a delinquent act, he will say he is sorry but feels no guilt - he says whatever he thinks will please those in power at the moment. Superficially the Level 3 conformist individual appears healthy, without neurotic symptoms, and likeable, and generally makes a good impression on correctional staff because of his good institutional adjustment.

At Level 4 (The Integration of Conflict and Response) the individual perceives the psychological impact of others. He has set roles for himself which are perfectionist and has globally accepted what others feel is right and wrong; he is in conflict because he is caught between two incompatible but equally important forces - to play the roles he set for himself vs. to give expression to his own needs. His own needs make him feel inadequate and ashamed. A person with this conflict may go on a drunken crime spree and do things which would make him feel guilty if he were conscious of his actions. He may also seek to become a petty gang leader to satisfy his

desire for power and prestige. In a sense he is the criminal from a sense of guilt - he commits crimes to substantiate his own guilt feelings. Also at Level 4 is the "cultural criminal" who was exposed to criminal values with which to identify. The adult at Level 4 feels conflict because he has developed a sense of guilt, while at previous levels of development no sense of guilt evolves. Consequently, individuals at this level are more amenable to treatment since the development of guilt is an indication of superego development.

Clearly the task of selection is to screen out those individuals whose ego development is fixed at Level 2, to differentiate which individuals at Level 3 are an acceptable risk, though they may not be a good risk, and to accept as many individuals as possible at Level 4. The assessment of ego functions leads to placing individuals at their appropriate level of ego development.

ORIENTATION AND COUNSELING

Counseling and orientation are structured to examine personal and social adjustments necessary to succeed in college, and the suggested approaches assume that the selection process has been reasonably successful in admitting students on whom counseling can have an impact. As you will see, both the individual counseling and group orientation strategies significantly depart from traditional strategies. They may appear directive to the point of being intrusive, but the extraordinary population and the limited time permitted to assist in the tradition process necessitate a departure from tradition.

Counseling and orientation must concentrate on remediating the ego deficits of the ex-offender. Jacobs and Dana (1975) administered the

California Psychological Inventory (CPI) to 151 inmates taking college courses in a Florida prison. They found no significant differences between the prisoners' scores and test norms on 13 of the CPI's 18 scales. Prisoners' scores were significantly below norms on the following scales: Well-Being, Socialization, Responsibility, Self-Control and Tolerance. According to Megargee (1971) significantly lower scores on these five scales indicate the following:

1. Responsibility - a reduced capacity to meet social and environmental demands and obligations. Bellak and Hurvich's categories of Judgment and Object Relations seem to apply here.
2. Self-Control - a lack of autonomy from impulsivity and egocentricity. The Regulation and Control of Drives, Affects and Impulses, and Synthetic-Integrative ego functions apply here.
3. Socialization - an egocentric inability to perceive one's effect on others. This category corresponds to Bellak and Hurvich's Object Relations and Defensive Functioning ego functions.
4. Tolerance - a lack of trust and confidence in others, cynicism, and prejudice are the traits indicated by low scores in this category. Defensive Functioning and Object Relations are closely related to Tolerance.
5. Well-Being - a diminished vitality and inability to cope with everyday life. This scale appears to correspond to Bellak and Hurvich's Mastery-Competence function which was discussed in the section on selection.

Individual counseling and group orientation must tackle these five personality characteristics. The counselor must take a case-

work approach in assisting the student to accept his responsibilities. He should make periodic inquiries of instructors regarding the student's attendance and performance in class, should maintain contact with the student's parole officer, and take an active role in helping the student budget his money. The group orientation should concentrate on developing study skills, budgeting time for studying, and learning decision-making techniques.

In dealing with Self-Control the counselor must actively explore the student's anxiety caused by having to delay his impulses for immediate gratification and to resist temptation. The orientation should employ role-playing in situations requiring self-control, explore the student's expectation of college, and discuss the frustration of working for a long time before the rewards of a college education can be enjoyed.

Discussing relationships with the opposite sex, with one's family, old friends in crime, and manipulating others are basic areas of focus in individual counseling concerned with improving Socialization. The group should concentrate on the same issues and explore making new friends and joining school clubs.

In trying to improve the student's Tolerance abilities, the counselor should confront the student on his feelings of contempt for straight people, for individuals who may be different from him, how and why he chose his friends, and what are his personal beliefs and commitments. The group should examine how one should react to opinions different from his own and should explore issues about which there are strong and differing opinions as a learning experience in tolerating others and their beliefs.

In the area of improving Well-Being the counselor must provide positive reinforcement of any improvement shown by the student in any aspect of his

adjustment. The group should bring in successful "alumni", both upper classmen and graduates to speak of their experiences and to provide proof that success is possible. Speakers from organizations of ex-offenders can lecture the group on problems of re-entry to society and the legal rights of ex-offenders.

These individual and group counseling strategies are markedly different from traditional approaches. They require a small caseload for the counselor to do an effective job, a commitment to maintain close monitoring of all aspects of the student's life, and a willingness to continue counseling students after their orientation phase is "completed" since the transition may take more than one or two semesters. Obviously these requirements call for changes in the traditional views of who is the counselor and what is his function, as well as of who is the student and what is the college's commitment in assisting him to succeed.

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